

Narrative by Josepha Sherman

I live on the Upper West Side in NYC, in a high-rise apartment. Late on September 10th, I finished writing my latest folklore book, MYTHOLOGY FOR STORYTELLERS, for ABC-CLIO. I finally sent it off to the publisher very early on September 11th, then went to bed. A few hours later, somewhere around 9:00 AM, I was awakened by the phone. A hysterical friend had managed to get through to me, screaming, "They're gone! They're gone!" I calmed her enough to find out to turn on CNN—and saw the whole horror. I have never felt so stunned and alone, and remember gasping "Oh God," over and over. My friend and I clung to the phone as though to a lifeline. Then I thought to check the Net. Sure enough, the Net was up, and the entire NY writing community started checking in. Having the Net was a sanity-saver for us all as one by one people logged on. The mayor was asking everyone to stay home, at it was eerie to look out over a silent city. With the airport closed, the only planes overhead were warplanes, and it was both frightening and reassuring to hear their powerful roar.

I was a little unnerved at being on the 23rd floor, but then reasoned that A) there were no planes but our military up there, and B) a random apartment house would hardly have been a target. The next day, 9/12, I was determined to show the terrorists that life went on, and got out to do some shopping. The local conversations were, of course, about 9/11, and the mood was subdued but determined. That night, the smell of burning was in the air, though not yet sickeningly strong.

On 9/13, the wind shifted and the air was filled with both the stench and the smoke. My balcony, particularly the table, was covered with what I wanted to believe was only soot. Since I had pneumonia this year, I was grateful to a friend in NJ who offered clean air for a couple of days.

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I got to the Port Authority Bus Station just in time for a bomb scare to evacuate the building. By this point, being a New Yorker, I was angry more than scared (we've had a lot of nut case bomb threats over the years). And I was determined to do what I could to help. I managed to calm a Brazilian family who didn't speak enough English to understand the cops, and soothe a poor, scared teenaged girl who was in tears.

Then, since my nerves were shaken by their fear, I went and had coffee, and then (two more bomb scares later) took the bus to NJ. There were, I learned later, bomb scares at Grand Central Station and the Empire State Building as well. (I think the entire city would have gone to attack the terrorists if they'd hurt that building!) There's a turn on the highway out of NYC that gives you a good view of the skyline. Everyone on the bus, as one, turned to look at where the Twin Towers had been. Nothing could be seen but the enormous cloud of dust and smoke, but it hurt as though the injury was my own. I think that's what everyone in NYC felt: A personal injury had been done.

I returned to NYC two days later, hung flags on my door and balcony, and wore a flag pin. There were flags EVERYWHERE: From window, from balconies, over doors, in windows, on light poles and bus stanchions, flying from cab antennas and car antennas—everywhere. The mood was slowly changing from fear to anger to pride. After the first stunned week, I haven't been afraid to fly, or do anything else, for that matter.

The city is back to normal. No surprise there. This is one tough city!